

Summary

DOE Consolidation Task Force Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind Planning Session

Thursday, October 30, 2003
Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services

Present: Nancy Armstrong, Mary-Margaret Cash, Doug Cox (for Jo Lynne DeMary), Scott Goodman (Chair), Emmett Hanger, Jr., Ronald Lanier, Jo Lynne DeMary (in attendance briefly), Henry Maxwell, Shirley Ricks (for Martha Abrams), Glen Slonneger, Lisa Surber, Darlene White, and David Young. DOE Staff: Karen Trump. Facilitator: Judy Burtner. Recorder: Kathryn Burruss.

Statement of Purpose

Develop a plan of implementation for consolidating services for the deaf and/or blind and multi-disabled students served by Virginia's two schools.

Objectives

1. Receive public comment
2. Receive and discuss requested information
3. Select an option from among the three remaining options
4. Review the draft report
5. Make a decision regarding the need for November 17 session (and develop an agenda if there is a session)

Public Comment

The following individuals spoke during the public comment period:

Gordon Landes, Lorine Peterson, John Pleasants, Emmit Jones, Glen Slonneger, Maureen Hollowell, Benny Lacks, Alan Justice, and Helen Crews.

Review of Requested Information

Karen Trump reviewed with the Task Force the following information:

- A review of the three remaining options with option 2 split into two options. The four options included the following:
 - Option 1: Leave both schools open with the following changes: downsize the business office and HR functions to centralized oversight from the DOE;

transfer all deaf and blind students to VSDB-Staunton, renovate the Staunton campus, build a new education building; reduce the Hampton program to a residential program for students with *severe* multiple disabilities; open the Hampton program to other children with severe disabilities regionally; or continue the Hampton program as a state agency day program (Maryland model).

- Option 2: Combine both programs at Hampton and build a new education building
 - Option 3: Combine both programs at Staunton and build a new education building
 - Option 4: Build a new campus at a new location
- For each option, facilitating and restraining forces were presented. In addition, possible savings from combining programs relative to the 2004-2006 biennium budget were presented. Information was also presented on other state schools for the deaf and blind (number of students served, operating budgets, and number of staff) for comparison purposes.
 - An explanation was given relative to the process of building a new school using the building of the Commonwealth Center for Children at Staunton as an example of the process and the outcome.
 - Discussions have been held with John Dickerson, a deaf architect, who has worked with the development of new schools in several other states serving hearing and visually impaired children. Discussions have focused on the process of building a new school and the general cost per square foot of such a school. Mr. Dickerson provided a rough estimate for a campus with a 300 student capacity of approximately \$48 million.

In discussions relative to the above information, Nancy Armstrong reported that staff from both schools had not met as proposed at the previous meeting to discuss possible changes for consolidation should Option 1 be chosen. She reported that the staff at the Staunton school did not feel it was feasible to meet to discuss consolidation because the program had previously been downsized and they could not see that further reductions were feasible. Ruby McMullin, reporting for Darlene White, confirmed the meeting had not been held.

In discussions relative to a location for a new school should Option 4 be selected, Scott Goodman suggested that the location not be addressed as part of the recommendation. Ronald Lanier stated that he felt the location should be included in the recommendation. The Task Force agreed that the Department of Education would determine the location of the facility should the recommendation to build a new school be selected.

Discussion of the Options

Before the discussion and selection of an option began, the facilitator reviewed the procedures for making decisions that were developed at the first meeting of the Task Force in June, 2003. The procedures included:

- Modified consensus – decision-making tool of choice
- Gradients of agreement – secondary decision-making tool
- Voting – 75% vote – secondary decision-making tool
- Decision stands regardless of whether all Task Force members are present

Following the review, members chose to modify the decision-making procedures. It was agreed that in the event that modified consensus could not be reached, majority vote would prevail. In addition, it was agreed that if the decisions were made by majority vote, the votes of each member would be recorded with their votes reflected in the final report. The members of the Task Force shared the following viewpoints about each option.

Option 1: Both schools remain open with changes

- Consolidation of services for children is in the appropriation language. The concept of consolidation does not apply only to consolidating the administrative functions.
- Both sites could be sold and money from the sale used to help pay for a school at a new site.
- There is a need to combine the blind students at one site in order to have a “critical mass” of students for optimal education/socialization.
- The deaf students also need to be at one site for “critical mass” purposes.
- “Currently” (referring to present students) is in the appropriation language. Hampton City School students do interact with the students in the day program of the school.
- There could be one administration for both sites.
- Comprehensive Services Act students could become a part of the schools. The schools could try to recruit students currently attending the Gallaudet Model Secondary School.

Option 2: Consolidate schools to the Staunton site

- There are Capital Improvement funds available that could be used for a new educational building.
- Staunton would need to develop a multi-disabled program and staff it.
- The location would not be as convenient to the military families who now use the Hampton site.
- This option would meet the desire of having all of the deaf and blind students at one site.
- Less than one-half of the students enrolled in the two programs would have to move.
- Staunton has an academic program in place.
- There is a training site for college-level student teachers in place at Staunton.
- Lead removal and other critical renovations are needed.
- Access to buildings and grounds would be an issue for multi-disabled students.
- There is significant heritage at the site.
- Community support is strong.
- Over 200 computers are on site for student use.
- Space is being rented to other agencies.
- It is in a central location to those being served (geographically).

Option 3: Consolidate schools to the Hampton site

- The Hampton City Schools currently feel they have no other alternatives to the space that they currently rent. However, this should not be taken into consideration when a decision is made regarding the future of the VSDBs.
- Local community interaction occurs in a wide variety of ways and offer a number of cultural opportunities to the students.
- It is located near a number of universities who offer support to the programs and students.
- The site is flat making it accessible for the multi-disabled students.
- The lead-abatement and asbestos removal projects have been completed.
- There was no maintenance reserve fund allocated during the last budget cycle.
- There would be a negative impact on the Staunton community.
- The buildings require low maintenance and would be easy to make into a “state of the art” site.
- The site has a rich heritage that should be preserved.
- There is significant technology available to assist students.
- An academic program would have to be developed even though Hampton previously had an academic program.
- There is concern about accreditation, which is tied to the academic program.
- There are 13 military facilities in the area.
- A good medical facility is located nearby.
- Travel from southwestern Virginia to Hampton would be a barrier.

Option 4: Close both schools and build a new school

- Best practices, evidence-based educational experiences, can best be offered in this setting.
- This option addresses the historical impasse of choosing one school over the other.
- A new school with improved services may attract additional students currently in other settings.
- A new school would be an efficient use of operating dollars, allowing the most dollars to be used in the classroom.
- There may be a loss of alumni support.
- There is an opportunity to honor the shared and individual heritage of both.
- Funding may be an issue.
- This option would resolve the issues of dual identities.
- There are job loss concerns for staff.
- The resulting combined number of students at one site will create “critical mass” for optimal education/socialization.
- This option allows creative forces to come together to plan the program.
- The buildings can be designed to specifically meet the needs of students with sensory impairments rather than continuing to teach in outdated buildings.

Decision Making

After the discussion, it was apparent members would not be able to choose an option using modified consensus. The members decided to vote. Voting was done in tiers. The first vote was a discussion format opportunity for each member to express his/her preference for each option. Following the above discussion, members engaged in further discussion narrowing the vote to the following two options:

- Option 1: Leave both open with changes
- Option 4: Close both and build new school

The final voting results and the reasons given for their votes are as follows:

Voting Results		
Name	Vote	Reasoning
G. Slonneger	Option 4	This option would provide improved services to students.
D. White	Option 1*	A continued presence at the Hampton site as a day program should be included with the new school being the umbrella for comprehensive, uniform services across Virginia.
H. Maxwell	Option 1	Necessary changes can be made to give a “big bang” for the dollars spent on both schools. This option can be worked with to meet the needs.
MM Cash	Option 4	The charge from the General Assembly is to consolidate services for students, thus Option 1 is not an option. Options 2 and 3 continue to alienate groups and continue the hurt feelings. Option 4 is in the best interest of the children.
D. Young	Option 4	The statements made by MM Cash could be repeated. The focus needs to be on the children. Options 2 and 3 only serve one half of the state.
E. Hanger	Option 1	This Option has the ability to do the required consolidation without offending both parties and meets the children’s needs.
D. Cox	Option 4	Option 1 is not an option from the General Assembly’s mandate. Option 4 is what best meets the needs of the children. It is ethical to build and not renovate and allows the opportunity to address the issue of choosing one school over the other.
S. Goodman	Option 4	Option 1 is not an option because the children cannot be broken into two groups that will provide effective educational opportunities for both groups. The location of the new site should be in the best possible place to be determined by what land is available. The alumni should provide input into the development of the new plan, and the heritage of both schools should be treated with equal

		importance by combining the best of both with buildings being named for key persons from both locations. In addition, pictures, statues, etc. from both sites can be represented.
L. Surber	Option 4	How can both schools change anymore? The new site should include the history from both schools. There is a need to stop the negative actions of one school against the other.
R. Lanier	Option 1	The resources are already in place on both campuses with well-established reputations in the community. There are no guarantees that the staff at the new school would have the credentials needed and there is a need for credentialed staff at both sites.
N. Armstrong	Option 1	I can live with Option 1 with changes.
S. Ricks	Option 4	It is in the best interest of the children who are to be served.
Total	Option 1 – 5 votes, Option 4 – 7 votes	

* D. White's vote was first recorded as being in support of Option 4 but she asked, after the completion of voting, that her vote be changed to Option 1.

Recommendation

It was agreed that as the result of the above vote, that Option 4, build a new school and close both existing schools, would be sent forward as the plan of the Task Force. It was agreed that the report will contain each member's vote and reasoning for their choice. Option 1, leave both schools open but with changes, would be the second choice. However, the changes were not developed into a specific plan.

Unresolved Issue

The Task Force on several occasions raised the question: "Are the schools state operated programs, agencies, or schools?" It was agreed this was an issue that needing clarification and resolution because of its impact on future funding for the schools, accreditation and compliance with regulatory requirements under No Child Left Behind and IDEA.

Report Development

Karen Trump reported she would develop the report for the Governor, the chairs of the Senate Finance, House Appropriations, and House and Senate Education committees. A draft report was shared with the Task Force members. Darlene White asked that the information created today be included to provide a more balanced view of both schools. The prepared report will be e-mailed to members by November 17 for their review and comment. Dr. Trump will also work

with the Office of Budget and Planning and the Department of General Services to develop a strategy for completing the needed capitol needs assessment for the new facility. Members are expected to respond to the draft quickly so the final report can be submitted by the December 1 deadline.

The proposed meeting date of November 17, 2003 was canceled.

Prepared by Kathryn Burruss and Judy Burtner
November 11, 2003